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Preparatory Committee
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Item 11 of the provisional agenda

REPORT ON STUDIES AND DOCUMENTATION FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE

Recommendations to the World Conference on Human Rights and its preparation submitted pursuant to paragraph 10 of General Assembly resolution 45/155

Report of the Secretary-General

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Introduction

1. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 45/155 of 18 December 1990 entitled "World Conference on Human Rights". In paragraph 10 of that resolution, the General Assembly requested non-governmental organizations concerned with human rights to undertake reviews and submit recommendations on the Conference and its preparation to the Preparatory Committee through the Secretary-General. Pursuant to paragraph 11 of the same resolution, whereby the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Preparatory Committee on the contributions made pursuant, inter alia, to paragraph 10, recommendations have been received by non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

2. In continuation of the recommendations contained in document A/CONF.157/PC/6 and Add. 1-8, recommendations from the Special Committee of International Non-Governmental Organizations on Human Rights at Geneva and its Sub-Committee on the Status of Women have been received.

RECOMMENDATIONS SUBMITTED BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN CONSULTATIVE STATUS

NGO statement requesting a study on human rights and traditional practices

3. The objectives of the World Conference on Human Rights, according to General Assembly resolution 45/155, are to review and assess progress in human rights since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; to identify obstacles and ways in which they might be overcome; to examine the relationship between development and the enjoyment by everyone of economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights; to examine ways to improve the implementation of human rights standards and instruments; to evaluate the effectiveness of the methods and mechanisms used by the United Nations; and to make concrete recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the United Nations activities and mechanisms and for the resources needed to that end.

4. Virtually all delegates to the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Conference spoke of the universality of human rights and underlined the indivisibity of political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights. It was generally accepted that respect for human rights, democracy and development are interrelated and that poverty breeds oppression while education and training, at both the individual and State level, is an effective remedy against the violation of human rights. There are, however, less easily discernible issues which require attention.

5. We, the undersigned non-governmental organizations*, note that the invocation of customary law and tradition, in all its aspects, often forms a major obstacle to the unreserved acceptance of human rights standards by States. Despite the importance of the subject, there is no easily accessible document on the way in which existing community norms and behaviour approach contemporary international human rights standards. Nor, on the other hand, is it known how they function to limit and/or impede those rights and freedoms laid down in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration and other human rights instruments. A measure of the problem is evident in the reservations which States parties attach to international instruments.

6. Equally, little is known of the circumstances that may trigger a change in community attitudes and traditions and thus ensure harmony with changing economic, social and political conditions. There are, however, many studies in social psychology and other disciplines which are relevant and could provide useful insights. As one speaker at the first session of the Preparatory Committee said, "... international politics is no longer the sheer exercise of power - it is the embodiment of the concrete realization of values corresponding to the present stage of civilization". Before such a concrete realization can take place, an essential stage must be to understand, and take account of, the dynamics of change in community thinking.

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* The list of participating NGOs is annexed.

7. Such basic information on the dynamics of change in community norms and tradition is also the key to the success of any worldwide training and educational activities in support of human rights. The need for such programmes was emphasized time and time again by delegates at the first session.

8. It is for these reasons that we, the undersigned non-governmental organizations, recommend the preparation of a report on the role and function of customary norms and tradition as they affect the enjoyment of human rights by the individual and society. The report is to be prepared under the supervision of the Centre for Human Rights and submitted to the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 as an integral part of the documentation prepared for this event. The report should take into account the effect of law, custom and stereotyping on the acceptance by the community of contemporary international human rights standards. In order to allow for the widest possible consultation, a first draft of the report should be made available to the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Conference on Human Rights.

9. It is further recommended that all sectors of the United Nations system, Governments, international and national organizations and institutions, and non-governmental organizations include in their reports to the Preparatory Committee for the World Conference an assessment of how far law, custom and stereotyping are advancing or impeding their respective aims and objectives.

ANNEX

Category I

International Alliance of Women
International Council of Women
International Council on Social Welfare
International Movement ATD Fourth World
International Planned Parenthood Federation
International Union of Family Organizations
Soraptomist International
World Assembly of Youth
World Federation of Democratic Youth
World Federation of United Nations Association
World Muslim Congress
Zonta International

Category II

African Association of Education for Development
Afro Asian People's Solidarity Association
All-India Women's Conference
American Association of Jurists
American Association of Retired Persons
Associated Country Women of the World
Baha'i International Community
Caritas International
General Arab Women's Federation
International Agency for Rural Industrialization
International Association of Democratic Lawyers
International Association of Penal Law
International Commission of Jurists
International Council of Jewish Women
International Federation of Resistance Movements
International Federation of Social Workers
International Federation of University Women
International Federation of Women Lawyers
International Federation of Ageing
International Fellowship of Reconciliation
International Races and Peoples
International Senior Citizens Association
Italian Centre of Solidarity
Law Association for Asia and the Pacific
Medical Women's International Association
Pan-African Women's Organization
Pan-Pacific & South-East Asia Women's Association
Socialist International Women
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts
World Teaching Profession
World Federation for Mental Health
World Federation of Methodist Women

World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations
World University Service
World Young Women's Christian Association

Roster

Indian Council of South America
International Association of University Presidents
International Confederation of Ex-Prisoners of War
International Movement of Apostolate of Children
La Leche League International Inc.
World Christian Life Community
World Peace Council

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